1999

People's Wars

McCormick, Gordon H.

M.E. Sharpe Inc.

Encyclopedia of conflicts since World War II. Volume 1: Afghanistan through Burundi. (1999).
p. 23-34.
http://hdl.handle.net/10945/49166

People's Wars

What is meant by the term "people's war"? The concept can be defined both narrowly and broadly. Defined narrowly, the term is used to denote the body of strategic thought on "protracted war" developed by Mao Zedong in the 1930s and 1940s, during the period of the Chinese Civil War and the struggle against the Japanese. This definition is firmly rooted in the larger Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle. Defined broadly, the concept of people's war is used generically to denote any form of guerrilla conflict or popular insurrection, regardless of its ideological roots. By this definition, the opening and middle stages of the Chinese Communist struggle against the Nationalist (Kuomintang) regime was an example of a people's war, as was the Afghan campaign against the Marxist regime in Kabul.

The definition of people's war used in this entry takes a middle course. The term, on the one hand, will be used to describe a body of ideas on population-based conflict or insurgency that goes beyond the specific concept of operations developed by Mao. At the same time, we will retain the ideological meaning of the term by referring to those forms of "popular warfare" based on the concept of class struggle. Defining the concept in this manner distinguishes it, on the one hand, from the type of conflict waged in Afghanistan, which would represent a more generalized form of guerrilla warfare, as well as from the type of class-based revolutionary conflict envisioned by Lenin, which was based primarily on political rather than military forms of struggle. While the last act of revolutionary takeover, in Lenin's view, would be carried out by a popular insurrection, the months and years leading up to the insurrection would be characterized by careful, behind-the-scenes political work, designed to place the revolutionary party in a position to catalyze a final uprising and seize power when the historical moment was deemed to be propitious. It would not be characterized by a period of revolutionary *war*, per se, in which the outcome of the struggle would be decided by a military interaction.

Although the concept of people's war, for definitional purposes, can be usefully distinguished from the larger concept of guerrilla warfare, we should not lose sight of the fact that the first is merely an ideological subset of the second. The defining operational problem, in each case, is the same: overcoming the conventional military superiority of the state (or occupying power) through an asymmetrical campaign based on the support (and resources) of a constituent population. While the leadership of a people's war will attempt to draw support from among a revolutionary class (classically, the peasantry), the non-Marxist insurgency will define its natural constituency along different lines (e.g., ethnicity, communal affiliation, or regional identity). Where the first defines its popular base "horizontally" (according to class) across national or ethnic lines, the second defines its base of support "vertically" (according to some other group identifier) without regard to its class affiliation.

The underlying organizational tasks facing the leadership of a people's war are similar to those faced by that of any insurgency. We

can define these as (1) *penetration,* which speaks to the revolutionary organization's need to "get inside" targeted social groupings as a prelude to "turning" them to the service of the organization's political and military objectives, (2) *transformation,* which speaks to the insurgency's need to consolidate its control over the targeted group and redirect some percentage of its resources to the organization's goals, and (3) *application,* which refers to the ways in which these resources are used to further develop an insurgent infrastructure, undermine the competing infrastructure of the state, and, ultimately, extend the insurgent's zone of control. Collectively, these tasks define the process of social mobilization. Every insurgent organization must address each of these operational tasks if it is to pose a viable challenge to the state. The manner in which it does so will define its theory of victory.

Revolutions and people's wars in the twentieth century have virtually all imitated or tried to imitate earlier revolutions. These successful cases of the past establish operational models that are adopted by latter-day revolutionaries who hope to repeat the success of those that preceded them by replicating their experience. While such cases have generally addressed the question of "why" one should revolt, as well as what revolutionary changes should be carried out in society at such time as one actually wins, the principal influence has been over *how* an armed revolt should be prosecuted in the first place. For those who come to the problem of overthrowing a standing regime with high ambition but little practical experience, a revolutionary paradigm offers an immediate (if often stylized) recipe for action.

The tradition of people's war, for its part, has been dominated by two original paradigms: the model of protracted conflict developed by Mao and the *foco* concept of guerrilla warfare developed by Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Most revolutionary insurgencies since the end of World War II have sought to either directly apply or adapt and refine one or the other of these baseline concepts of operation to local circumstances. Each of these models can be usefully defined in contrast to the other. The concept of protracted conflict developed by Mao is designed to be prosecuted by a "low-profile" organization carrying out a "bottom-up" approach to insurgency. By contrast, it can be said that the theory of insurgency developed by Che Guevara is designed to be prosecuted by a "high-profile" organization from the "top down." In certain key respects, these two models represent operational opposites. In doing so, they bound the larger concept of people's war.

The Chinese Model of People's War

Mao's assessment of the operational problem facing the Chinese Communist Party during its early struggles in the 1920s and 1930s rested on two essential considerations that bear on the general study of people's war. The first of these was his assessment of the standing government's overwhelming material advantage over the Communist party. The second was the government's equally apparent political weakness. Deposing the old regime, in Mao's view, would require the party to overcome its material weaknesses by exploiting the opportunities provided by its comparative political advantage. As Mao observed at the time, "All guerrilla units start from nothing and grow." At the outset of this type of struggle, the standing regime represents a force in being. The guerrilla, by contrast, represents a force in development. The latter begins with little more than an

idea. The guerrilla's one opening under these circumstances, according to the theory of class conflict, is provided by the inherent frailty of the regime's political base and the corresponding weakness of its institutional presence throughout the countryside. Exploiting this opening, Mao argued, will permit a guerrilla force to bridge the gap between its grand ends and limited means over the course of the struggle.

Time, Space, and Initiative

The strategy designed by Mao to square the circle between ends and means rested on the calculated use of time and space. Buying time, Mao argued, was essential if the regime's strengths were to be turned into weaknesses and the guerrilla weaknesses were to be turned into strengths. The struggle, in its most abstract form, was envisioned to be an institutional contest between the developing architecture of the "new state" on the one hand and the declining institutions of the "old state" on the other. Building the new and dismantling the old, Mao recognized, would be a protracted undertaking. As this process unfolds, however, the relative balance between the guerrilla and the government would gradually shift. This shift, furthermore, could be expected to take on a dynamic quality over time. Guerrilla successes, he argued, would tend to be self-reinforcing, just as the regime's growing record of failure would tend to lead to the further erosion of the state and its administrative organs. While this process would ebb and flow, over the long run the decline of the state could be expected to accelerate, eventually at an increasing rate. The guerrillas' principal operational challenge, in this view, was not to end the war quickly, but to keep it going.

Unlimited time, in this strategy, required unlimited space. Space, in Mao's view, would provide the guerrillas with the room for maneuvers to buy the time necessary to win. All space, in this sense, is not created equal. For practical purposes, a distinction was made between territory that, in the opening stages of the engagement, was under the effective control of the regime, and that which was not. If the guerrillas' evaluation of the political environment facing each side was accurate, the regime's administrative control throughout the countryside would be imperfect. To survive their weak beginning, the guerrillas would open the struggle in those areas of the country in which the regime was weak and avoid making a stand in those areas of comparative regime strength. In pursuing such a strategy, the insurgency would give itself the best opportunity to gain the time it required to establish an institutional counterweight to the state. Revolutionary organization, in turn, would further extend the guerrillas' ability to establish effective spatial control.

These ideas formed the basis of Mao's concept of protracted war. According to this formula, the war will evolve via the dual mechanisms of "destruction and construction"—through the step-by-step destruction of the state and the associated construction of the new counterstate. The two, in Mao's view, are mutually dependent and must proceed in tandem. The erosion of the government's administrative architecture at the margin of its control will open additional opportunities for the insurgents to expand their own institutional presence, just as the organization's earlier (if still limited) institutional base provided the springboard to open its campaign against the state in the first place. This can be expected to take on an iterative quality over time, as each new advance by

the guerrillas lays the groundwork for the next. The speed with which this campaign unfolds will be regulated by the strength of the state (which will tend to increase as the opposition pushes forward from the periphery to the state's center of gravity), the nature of the government's counter-strategy, the level of local resistance to the guerrillas' efforts to establish their own institutional presence, and the natural time limits associated with building an alternative set of political and military forms.

Expressed in geographical terms, this progression is intended to slowly result in an extension of guerrilla authority from peripheral areas of the countryside (or political margin), where state control will be comparatively weak, toward the cities (or political center) of the country where the position of the regime is traditionally much stronger. This process can be described as one of protracted encirclement, in which the urban regions of the country are encircled and eventually detached from the interior. The dynamic quality of this strategy is manifest in several ways. First, it calls for the guerrillas to push into areas of marginal control, even as they are being pulled into these areas by the political vacuum created by the retreat of the state. Second, as the opposition gains ground, it will naturally acquire the means to gain strength by gradually expanding its base of popular support. The inverse process, meanwhile, is occurring with the state, which is losing ground in a zero-sum contest for territorial control with the guerrillas. The result, in theory, is a compound shift in the relative balance of advantage as the guerrillas become absolutely stronger and the regime grows absolutely weaker at a more or less equivalent rate.

The nature of this encirclement strategy is somewhat different from that which typically characterizes Western military thought. For Mao, encirclement is not achieved by means of development, but through a process of "strategic convergence." Encirclement in the first sense, as one commentator noted some years ago, refers to a process of "eccentric maneuver," in which the attacking force advances from a single point to surround and strike at the enemy's flanks. In the Maoist system, by contrast, encirclement has taken on a more subtle cast. It is not a single action, but a complex "concentric maneuver" in which semi-autonomous forces converge on their target from multiple points in a protracted series of coordinated moves. Such an approach, if successful, will complicate the task facing the regime, which will be forced to counteract the guerrillas on multiple fronts, while simplifying the task facing the insurgents, who will be able to reduce their profile (and hence their vulnerability) to the enemy by not placing all of their eggs in a single (easily targeted) basket.

The Evolution of the Armed Struggle

A centerpiece of this strategy is the development of a series of rural bases from which the insurgents will attempt to extend their areas of control. "Political mobilization," Mao observed, is a fundamental condition for winning the war. Mobilization, in turn, will only be translated into effective insurgent support if it results in the creation of a network of strategic areas that are able to service the guerrillas' material needs. The base area, in this sense, provides a "protective shell" that provides the guerrillas with the opportunity "to organize, equip, and train." It is formed by bringing a large number of points of influence together under a common administrative center. This process is achieved by establishing a local military

advantage, displacing (or neutralizing) the residual presence of the old regime, and creating an alternative set of governing and administrative institutions. This progression, once again, is a dynamic one. According to Abimael Guzman, one of Mao's recent imitators, "Base development, the [concomitant] development of [a] popular guerrilla army, and the resulting extension of the people's war [can be expected to take on a] momentum of their own, leading to the greater unfolding of the revolutionary situation." One thing leads to the next.

In developing this view, Mao clearly distinguished between "guerrilla bases" and "guerrilla zones." The guerrilla base, as we have suggested, is a region that has already been incorporated into the emerging insurgent regime. While Mao acknowledged that there could be different types of bases, depending upon their location and relative vulnerability to government attack, each represents a guerrilla "stronghold." Such strongholds can be distinguished from guerrilla zones, which Mao defined as areas in which the insurgents were able to operate with relative freedom, but where the state still retained a meaningful political and military presence. The guerrilla zone, in this sense, is considered to be an area of transition (contested ground). The final conquest of the zone, according to Mao, will be achieved by using the established basing system as a springboard to converge on any remaining state presence within the target area. Bases, in this view, effectively "encircle" guerrilla zones, which, once captured, will be absorbed into an expanded base area.

The revolution, in Mao's concept, will unfold in a series of stages, moving from the "strategic defensive," through a period of "strategic equilibrium," on to the "strategic offensive." The initial defensive stage of the conflict can be characterized as a period of "preparation." The insurgents' overriding objective during this phase is to establish a secure political base in the interior from which they can subsequently branch out and expand their range of operations. This is a period of high vulnerability. Like a water course, the guerrillas must find their own level. Decisive battles, head-on engagements, and areas of regime strength must all be avoided as the opposition gradually lays down its roots. This view was summarized nicely by Mao in his argument that the "first principle of war is to preserve oneself, and destroy the enemy." The insurgents' primary concern during the defensive stage of the struggle, in this view, must be on preserving their core organization, from which the means to destroy the enemy will eventually develop. By the end of this period, much of the countryside will have been transformed into a political checkerboard. While the regime will still enjoy effective control at the center, large areas of the countryside will have been brought under guerrilla influence.

The second stage of the conflict, strategic equilibrium, will be reached when the insurgents feel they have achieved "equivalence" with the incumbent regime. Mao referred to this stage as a period of "stalemate." If the initial defensive struggle can be described as a period of preparation, this phase of the war can be characterized as one of "consolidation." While the overriding concern during phase one was to establish an initial series of base areas, the primary operational objective in stage two will be to geographically connect these bases in an effort to consolidate and further extend the guerrillas' zone of control. Over time, the regime's remaining positions of influence in the interior are to be restricted, isolated, and gradually disconnected from the center. The checkerboard or "jigsaw" pattern

of influence that characterized the end of phase one will evolve into an increasingly continuous pattern of guerrilla control by the end of phase two. By the end of this period, the regime will find itself forced into a defensive posture, preoccupied with hanging on to what it has and decreasingly able to move offensively against the guerrillas.

In Maoist parlance, the final phase of a people's war is the period of "annihilation." It might also be thought of as a period of "exploitation," in which the institutional groundwork laid during the preparatory and consolidative phases of the struggle are brought to fruition. The guerrillas will enter this stage poised to transition to the strategic offensive. The early pattern of territorial dispersion that flagged the opening weakness of the guerrillas will have been transformed over time into a pattern of territorial control in which the insurgents will have surrounded all but the most important points of regime influence. This development, in Mao's view, should be matched by a reorganization of significant elements of the guerrilla "army," which can now be gradually reformed into units capable of carrying out fluid but increasingly conventional operations. Guerrilla warfare, according to Mao, is not a strategy of choice but of necessity, imposed by the initial material weakness of the opposition. Once the balance of advantage in the conflict has swung to the opposition, the guerrillas are in a position to come out of the shadows and confront the regime on its own terms.

The Cuban Model of People's War

The Cuban model of people's war, codified by Che Guevara, was based on a highly stylized (and often inaccurate) interpretation of the Cuban insurrection (1956–1959). The baseline document outlining the key features of this model was written by Che Guevara and published by the Cuban Ministry of the Armed Forces in 1960 under the title *Guerrilla Warfare.* It was Che Guevara's first and most influential book. Guevara opened the monograph with the following observation: "The victory of the Cuban people over the Batista dictatorship . . . showed plainly the capacity of the people to free themselves by means of guerrilla warfare from a government that oppresses them." Three "fundamental lessons," he argued, could be drawn from this experience: First, that "popular forces can win a war against the army"; second, that "it is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making [a] revolution exist, the insurrection can create them"; and, third, that "in underdeveloped America the countryside is the basic area of fighting." The model of action that emerged from these "lessons" would shape or otherwise influence revolutionary efforts over the next thirty years.

Guevara's concept of operations was developed without reference to Mao's earlier writings on protracted war or a close understanding of the experiences of the Chinese Revolution. Guevara and Fidel Castro both claimed to have only been introduced to Mao's work in 1958, after the key features of the Cuban insurrection were already well defined. In their view and the view of others, this proved to be fortuitous, freeing them from the temptation to apply revolutionary lessons from a time and place that may have little to do with the particular challenges (and opportunities) faced by the Cuban guerrillas. The "university of experience," in Guevara's view, was a more useful instructor "than a million volumes of books." This perspective was echoed by Régis Debray, one of the chief interpreters of the Cuban insurrec-

tion, who suggested that it was a "stroke of good fortune that Fidel had not read the writings of Mao Zedong before disembarking on the coast of Oriente: he could thus invent, on the spot and out of his own experience, principles of a military doctrine in conformity with the terrain."

Where Mao's concept of protracted conflict may have been an appropriate model for the Far East, the new doctrine of people's war that emerged from the experience of the Cuban insurrection, it was argued, was the model of choice for the unique circumstances found in Latin America. "Revolutionaries in Latin America," Debray observed, were "reading Fidel's speeches and Che Guevara's writings with eyes that have already read Mao on the anti-Japanese war, Giap, and certain texts of Lenin—and they think they recognize the latter in the former." This, he argued, was both a distorted and dangerous "superimposition." The popular struggle in Latin America, according to Debray, possessed "highly special and profoundly distinct conditions of development, which [could] only be discovered through a particular experience." Prior "theoretical works on people's war," accordingly, could "do as much harm as good." While such writings, he suggested, "have been called the grammar books of the war, . . . a foreign language is learned faster in a country where it is spoken than at home studying a language manual." The Cuban experience, in short, was believed to offer a new paradigm for action.

The *Foco*

The central instrument in Guevara's theory was the guerrilla *foco.* The foco or guerrilla band, in Guevara's view, was the nucleus of the insurrection. It would be comprised of a handful of dedicated men who would "jump start" the campaign to overthrow the standing government through the power of example. Over time, Guevara envisioned, the foco would naturally begin to attract recruits. As this occurred it would slowly grow until it reached some maximum (optimal) size, which Guevara defined as somewhere between thirty and fifty men. At this point, it would split in two, each foco working independently of the other to attract a following in different regions of the country. Over time, as this budding process continued, the number of operational guerrilla bands would grow until the insurgents would eventually become a force to be reckoned with in the countryside. In Guevara's view this process was similar to that of a beehive "when at a given moment it releases a new queen, who goes to another region with a part of the swarm." The "mother hive," in this case, "with the most notable guerrilla chief will stay in the less dangerous places, while the new columns will penetrate other enemy territory [and repeat the earlier] cycle."

Guevara's concept of operations, to be sure, shared certain features with the theory of protracted war formulated by Mao. First and foremost was the assumption that the guerrillas' natural base of support would be found among the peasantry. It followed, in turn, that the natural locus of the insurgency should also be in the countryside. While Guevara, at least in theory, did not completely dismiss the supporting role that could be played by an urban underground, he clearly relegated the struggle in the cities to a subordinate position. The insurrection would turn on the rural guerrilla. Those who, "following dogma," still believed that a revolutionary action could only be carried out by urban workers, underrated, in his

view, both the revolutionary sentiment of the peasantry on the one hand and the difficulties associated with operating in an urban environment on the other. "Illegal workers' movements," Guevara argued, faced "enormous dangers" (which were not similarly faced by their rural counterparts) because of their greater proximity to the regime's center of influence. To offset this greater risk, "They must function secretly without arms." The rural guerrilla, by contrast, is able to operate "beyond the reach of the oppressive forces," and is thus able to sidestep the state's opening advantage.

Like Mao, Guevara also believed that the insurgent struggle would evolve in stages. The first stage of the conflict was the "nomadic" phase, in which the initial guerrilla nucleus must continually remain on the move in order to survive. As the foco's relationship with the peasantry began to stabilize, the guerrillas would move into the second, "semi-nomadic" phase, in which the guerrillas, while still retaining a high level of fluidity, would be able to establish the first permanent base areas. The final phase of the conflict, Guevara argued, was the stage of "suburban guerrilla warfare." In language reminiscent of Mao, Guevara wrote that this stage would finally enable the guerrillas to "encircle fortified bases," engage in "mass action," and confront the army in open battle and win. "The enemy will fall," he suggested, when "the process of partial victories becomes transformed into final victories, that is to say, when the [army] is brought to accept the battle in conditions imposed by the guerrilla band; there he is annihilated and his surrender compelled." This, in turn, would ultimately result in an uprising of popular sentiment against the standing regime, sweeping it from power.

The Heroic Guerrilla

While Guevara's writings on people's war share certain similarities to those of Mao, the strategic theory that underlies this work is, in the end, quite distinct. First, in contrast to Mao, Guevara gave primacy to what he referred to as the "subjective" rather than "objective" conditions for victory. A successful insurrection, in this view, did not require that the peasantry be already primed to revolt; the conditions for revolution could often be engineered by the guerrilla band. While Guevara gave at least passing reference to the necessary preconditions for revolution in his initial discussion of the problem in *Guerrilla Warfare,* this caveat was increasingly relaxed over time. Guerrilla conflicts, he argued in a later article, could be successfully prosecuted throughout Latin America. Once set in motion, the revolution would "make itself." While the "initial conditions" did not exist everywhere in the orthodox sense of the term, the desire for revolutionary change lay just below the surface of the popular consciousness. It was only necessary to define, release, and finally channel these sentiments.

In contrast to Mao, Guevara's theory of victory ultimately relied heavily on the spontaneity of the insurgent's natural allies to provide the guerrilla foco with the critical mass it required to win. Guevara assumed, implicitly, that Latin-American society was in an inherently unstable equilibrium. The task facing the guerrilla nucleus was to aggravate the tension that he believed defined every Latin-American society, kick out the props that held up the old regime, and stand back while the target government was overcome in a popular uprising. Once set in motion, the guerrillas would not so much control this event as ride it into power. What

was required under these circumstances was not a grassroots, step-by-step program of local contact, indoctrination, and organization, but an action-oriented program designed to capture the popular imagination and inspire the peasantry "from above." The foco's operational challenge, in this respect, was to sharpen and accelerate the natural process of social polarization, raise the peasants' political consciousness, and embolden them to join the revolution.

While the Chinese model of people's war considered political organization to be a necessary precondition for social mobilization, the Cuban model argued that a high-profile "guerrilla outbreak" could be used to effectively bypass the organizational requirement and proceed directly to mobilization. The basis of the insurgency, in the first case, rests with the vitality of the guerrillas' interlocking, village-based associations. Collectively, these represent an institutional counterweight to the state and the foundation of the insurgency's political and military position. The basis of the insurgency, in the second case, rests squarely on the shoulders of the guerrilla combatant, and through him, the guerrilla foco. Success or failure in this case depends on the power of their example. The guerrilla, for his part, must be a "fighter-teacher," who "need know little more than what is required of a good man or soldier." The guerrilla foco, for its part, must be an "armed nucleus," able to employ its limited resources to move its would-be followers to action. Creating this effect would not depend on organization, but on courage, discipline, and a willingness to act.

As this discussion suggests, the Cuban model placed great importance on the psychological dimensions of a guerrilla conflict. The guerrilla combatant, we are told, must never lose faith. He must "see reasons for a favorable decision even in moments when the analysis of the adverse and favorable conditions does not show an appreciable positive balance." It is particularly important to continually generate the impression of impending victory. This can be achieved initially in small ways that have big effects. A small guerrilla force can enhance its offensive punch, for example, by "striking like a tornado" to "sow panic" within the enemy's ranks. The cumulative effects of small victories won in such a fashion can, in turn, have higher-order effects on the general morale (and, hence, effectiveness) of the regime's military and political base, imbuing them with a sense of imminent doom. As these perceptions begin to take hold, the "objective conditions" of the conflict will gradually begin to shift to the insurgents' advantage, making it increasingly easy to sustain this momentum over time. The guerrillas will win when the enemy has finally come to believe that their own defeat is inevitable.

The theory of guerrilla warfare advanced by Che Guevara, in the end, had an uneven relationship to the underlying dynamics of the Cuban insurrection. Many aspects of the Cuban experience that proved to be critical to the ultimate success of the July 26 revolutionary movement were either left out or significantly downplayed in Guevara's concept of operations. Several of these should be noted here. First and foremost, perhaps, was Guevara's increasingly unrealistic view of the "revolutionary readiness" of Latin-American society. As noted above, Guevara gave little attention to the particular preconditions that must exist to bring even the best-laid plan to seize power in a popular insurgency to fruition. Revolution for Che Guevara could effectively be created out of whole cloth. What was of critical importance was not the particular state of society, or

even the competing institutional strength of the opposition, but the courage, fortitude, and determination of the guerrilla fighter. Winning, in his view, boiled down to an act of will. Weak, pre-existing objective conditions could be offset by the individual guerrilla's grim refusal to accept defeat.

Second, in focusing on the *rural* guerrilla, Guevara ignored the decisive role played by the urban underground during the Cuban insurrection. The latter provided significant assistance to Fidel's rural operations. During the early days of the war, in particular, support from the July 26 movement's pre-existing urban networks was critical to the very survival of the rural foco. Throughout the course of the war, the actions of the urban underground—often carried out in a coordinated and simultaneous manner across the country—served as a major source of distraction, providing the guerrillas with the breathing space they required to stay in the game. The army was continually faced with the need to divide its efforts between the countryside and the cities, which made it difficult to concentrate on finding, fixing, and finally destroying Fidel's small group of rural combatants. In these and other ways, the cities proved to be a key variable in the outcome of the war. Despite this fact, the role of the urban underground was effectively dismissed in Guevara's writings in favor of his naturally heroic country cousin.

Finally, as much as Guevara appreciated the inherently dynamic, interactive nature of warfare, in attempting to generalize from the Cuban experience he imposed a post facto order and associated determinism on the course of the Cuban insurrection that it did not possess. Under the best of circumstances, combat is an uncertain process. There is often a high level of uncertainty surrounding the thousands of individual events that might make up a battle, and the hundreds of battles that might make up a war, which will often prove to be decisive in determining who is left standing at the end of the day. This was certainly the case in the Cuban insurrection, where except for happy chance, the guerrillas could have been defeated on any number of occasions during the course of the struggle. As the Duke of Wellington said of the Battle of Waterloo, "it was a close run thing." And yet, the problematic character of the conflict (and guerrilla warfare in general) is missing in Guevara's interpretive mode. The inherent uncertainty surrounding the problem of revolutionary action, in this case, is effectively replaced by a discussion of the guerrilla's fighting spirit. The guerrilla, in Guevara's view, will dominate events because of his superior determination.

The limits of this last assumption were demonstrated once and for all in Guevara's final action in Bolivia (1966-1967), where he was captured and killed attempting to put his theory into practice, one last time. The dramatic nature of his defeat proved to be the death knell for his model of guerrilla warfare. While the heroic quality of his death served to inspire those who came after him, subsequent guerrilla operations in Latin America would be defined by their efforts to correct the weaknesses inherent in his voluntarist theory of people's war.

Summary: Two Models of Guerrilla Warfare

The Chinese and Cuban models of people's war represent competing views of the structure and dynamics of guerrilla warfare. While both theories acknowledge that the underlying basis of revolutionary change ultimately rests on long-run historical forces, the operational guidance given to revolution-

ary hopefuls attempting to tap into and harness these forces, in each case, is distinct. For the Maoist, this is ultimately a problem of organization. Organization, in this sense, means building a grassroots, village-based alternative to the state. It follows that the chief measure of performance—which in this case is provided not by the scope or intensity of one's military actions, but the scope, depth, and vitality of one's organizational forms. The guerrilla's ability to pose a political and military challenge to the state is believed to be a by-product of his slowly developing institutional base. There is nothing "willful," in this view, about revolutionary outcomes. Strength of character and a pure heart are not considered to be effective substitutes for building an institutional counterweight to the state.

The opposite point of view, in many respects, defines the Cuban model of insurgency. Guerrilla actions, in this theory, are not a manifestation of popular support, but the source of such support in the first place. The target population, in this respect, is not "organized" but "impressed." Popular mobilization is less an iterative *process* than a catalytic *event,* in which the insurgents' natural constituency, spurred by the dramatic character of guerrilla actions, discovers its revolutionary identity and joins the rebellion. This shift, as noted, is expected to occur with little or no organizational investment by the insurgents. It will occur not as a result of a prior shift in local control, but in the wake of a general change in the sentiment of the revolutionary class. The guerrillas' primary task, then, is not institutional but psychological. Their goal is to capture the popular imagination in the expectation of generating a popular uprising against the state. Will, rather than numbers, can be expected to carry the day.

These two models of people's war, then, can be defined by a simple dichotomy. The Chinese model represents a bottom-up, low-profile approach to guerrilla conflict. For the low-profile challenger, insurgency is considered to be an institutional contest. The conflict will be pursued by undermining the institutional architecture of the state and replacing it with the guerrillas' own institutional alternative. Popular support is mobilized at the grassroots level (from the bottom up) in a staged process of organization building. The Cuban model, by contrast, can be defined as a top-down, high-profile approach to insurgency. For the high-profile challenger, a guerrilla conflict will not be prosecuted by undermining the state's institutional forms, but by attacking its perceptual foundations. The regime will not be slowly dismantled and replaced, but effectively taken by storm (from the top down) in a psychological convergence of popular sentiment away from the old regime and in favor of the opposition. The guerrilla's operational challenge is, first, to provide the spark that sets the conflict in motion and, second, to serve as a conduit to channel the population's revolutionary sentiments.

Gordon H. McCormick

Bibliography

Boorman, Scott A. *The Protracted Game: A Wei-chi Interpretation of Maoist Revolutionary Strategy.* London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Childs, Matt D. "An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's *Foco* Theory." *Journal of Latin American Studies* (October 1995).

Connor, Walker. *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Debray, Régis. *Revolution in the Revolution?* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980.

Dunn, John. *Modern Revolutions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Guevara, Che. *Guerrilla Warfare.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

———. "Guerrilla Warfare: A Method." In *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto (Che) Guevara,* ed. John Gerassi. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

———. "Interview with Laura Berquist" (No. 1). In *Che: Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara,* ed. Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.

Guzman, Abimael. "Interview." *El Diario,* July 24, 1988.

Johnson, Chalmers. *Autopsy on People's War.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Katzenbach, Edward L., Jr., and Gene Hanrahan. "The Revolutionary Strategy of Mao Tse-tung." *Political Science Quarterly* (September 1955).

Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). "Guerrilla Warfare." In *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare,* trans. and ed. Samuel B. Griffith II. Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992.

———. "On Protracted War." In *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung.* Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967.

———. "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan." In *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung.* Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967.

McCormick, Gordon H. "Che Guevara's Revolutionary Odyssey." *Queen's Quarterly* (Summer 1998).

———. *Peruvian Maoism: The Shining Path and the Theory of People's War.* Santa Monica: RAND, 1992.

———. *Sharp Dressed Men: Peru's Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.* Santa Monica: RAND, 1993.

Tucker, Robert C. *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1969.